

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1938

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: OEXC, DM
SUBJ: APPRIISAL OF GUY/WELLS BAND VISIT TO PRB

REF COTONOU 1920

1. ALTHOUGH THE TWO GUY/WELLS CONCERTS IN COTONOU WERE MEMORABLE, THE BAND'S VISIT TO THE PRB WAS LESS OF A SUCCESS THAN WE HOPED FOR. WE ATTRIBUTUE SHORTFALL MOSTLY TO COMPLETE LACK OF COOPERATION ON THE PART OF THE HOST GOVT, BUT ALSO TO LESSER DEGREE TO CONFLICT WITH ONE OTHER CULTURAL EVENT, AND COINCIDENCE WITH THE MUSLIM TABASKI FESTIVAL DECLARED ONLY TWO DAYS EARLIER.

2. BOTH CONCERTS WERE TECHNICALLY EXCELLENT DESPITE POOR ACOUSTICS IN THE AUDITORIUM AND FACT THAT BAND WAS PLAYING WITH RENTED EQUIPMENT THEY HAD NOT USED BEFORE. AUDIENCE REACTION BOTH NIGHTS WAS ENTHUSIASTIC, ALTHOUGH THE BAND FELT THOSE PRESENT WERE SLOW TO WARM UP THE FIRST NIGHT. MEMBERS OF BAND MADE A GOOD IMPRESSION, BOTH ON STAGE AND OFF, ALTHOUGH THEIR LACK OF FRENCH LANGUAGE PREVENTED THEM FROM MIXING FREELY WITH THE BENINESE.

3. AMB'S RECEPTION AFTER INVITATIONAL CONCERT THE FIRST NIGHT WAS WELL ATTENDED, ALTHOUGH MANY INVITED BENINESE DID NOT ATTEND AND SOME IN ATTENDANCE HAD NOT BEEN INVITED.

4. MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS DEVELOPED AS RESULT OF BORDER CLOSURE BETWEEN TOGO AND BENIN, CAUSING USE OF COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT THAT DID NOT ACCEPT ALL BAGGAGE. SUITABLE

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SUBSTITUTE EQUIPMENT HAD TO BE RESTLED UP IN COTONOU AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL. AS RESULT HIS CONTINGENY PLANNING WITH A LOCAL BAND AIR AFRIQUE, ADMINOFFICER WAS ABLE TO GET THE BAND TECHNICALLY OPERATIONAL AND SEE THAT THEIR EXCESS BAGGAGE WAS MOVED WITH THEM ON OUTGOING FLIGHT.

5. ULTIMATELY, RESPONSIBILITY FOR LIMITED IMPACT IN A COUNTRY CRAZY ABOUT JAZZ MUST BE ATTRIBUTED TO PRB'S UNCOOPERATIVE-NESS. MIN OF INFORMATION AND MEDIA CHIEFS CONSISTENTLY REFUSED TO CARRY ADVANCE PUBLICITY IN PRESS OR RADIO. RADIO FINALLY DID CARRY HALF-HOUR USIS-PREPARED TEXT WITH EXAMPLES OF BAND'S MUSIC, BUT THIS SAME DAY AS FIRST CONCERT, AND DURING SIESTA TIME. CONCERTS HAVE NOT BEEN MENTIONED ONCE BY RADIO OR NEWSPAPER SINCE THEN. ONLY A MODERATE NUMBER OF THE 150 OR SO SENIOR OFFICIALS INVITED SHOWED UP, AND NOT ONE MINISTER ATTENDED EITHER THE INVITATIONAL CONCERT OF AMB'S RECEPTION FOLLOWING, ALTHOUGH ALL WERE INVITED. WE WERE INFORMED BY FORNMINISTRY THAT MIN OF JUSTICE LT COL OHOUENS WAS ASSIGNED TO ATTEND THAT INITIAL CONCERT AS PRB'S TOKEN OF OFFICIAL COURTESY. ALTHOUGH CONCERT WAS CONSPICUOUSLY DELAYED ONE-HALF HOUR FOR HIM ALONE, HE NEVER TURNED UP. THERE HAS BEEN NO EXPLANATION, OFFICIAL OR PRIVATE, FOR HIS FAILURE TO BE PRESENT.

6. ON BALANCE, BAND'S VISIT IS SEEN BY EMBASSY AS POSITIVE US GESTURE OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE WITH LIMITED RESULTS. INCIDENTALLY, THE LARGE TOURS IN SPITE OF GOVT'S NON-COOPERATION CONFIRM THAT WE CAN STILL GET INFORMATION TO THE BENINOIS WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE LOCAL MEDIA (WHICH ARE GOVT CONTROLLED), THROUGH USIS WEEKLY BULLETIN AND WORD OR MOUTH. ENGLE

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